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March 28, 2023

**Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety
Testimony from Rep. William Penterman in favor of SB 97**

Thank you, Chairman Wanggard, for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 97, and thank you to comember of the committee for taking the time to hear my testimony.

In 2018, Girl Scout Troop 3055 from the Eau Claire area was taking part in Wisconsin's Adopt-a-Highway program, picking up trash along the side of the road. Their community service was tragically cut short when a driver hit the group, killing three girls and one adult. Volunteers who clean our state and county highways as part of the Adopt-a-Highway programs deserve better protection under the law.

To help improve the safety of these Adopt-a-Highway volunteers, this legislation doubles the fines for motorists who fail to follow traffic laws through the designated cleanup area. This will increase the penalties to the same level as highway maintenance and construction workers. It is our goal that through awareness we will encourage drivers to look out for volunteers working on the sides of the roads. SB 97 is based on 2021 SB 653. It has bi-partisan support.

Every day, selfless individuals give back to their community. Volunteering to clean roadsides and ditches is one of the ways many people do just that. In this small way, we can protect these volunteers so they can keep doing a good service for their communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration of Senate Bill 97. I would be happy to answer any question you may have.



To: Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

From: Rep. Jodi Emerson

Re: Support of SB 97

Dear Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

On November 3rd, many elected officials were busy working. It was the weekend before the election and it was time to get out the vote.

For Girl Scout Troop #3055, they were busy cleaning up a highway under Wisconsin's Adopt-a-highway program. Children and adults from Halmstad and Southview Elementary in Chippewa Falls donned bright green yellow safety vests and went to work doing what Girl Scouts do, trying to make their corner of the world a better place.

However, 3 girls and one adult would never go home that day. Jayna Kelley, Autumn Helegeson, Hayley Hickle and Hayley's mother Sara Jo Schneider were hit by a vehicle and killed that day. Another member of their troop, Maddie Zwiefelhofer, was hit and critically injured. She spent weeks in the hospital before she was able to return home.

When I heard about this accident, it hit me in the gut. Not only because I knew someone who was on scene but because I had spent years as a Girl Scout Troop leader and it never crossed my mind that helping our community in this way could have such deadly consequences.

SB 97 expands the definition of highway maintenance or construction area to include those who are cleaning up trash and the areas adjacent to the road. This bill is a good fix to an existing loophole.

Every year, volunteers from businesses, families, clubs, sports teams, church groups, and yes, even scout troops make sure that over 11,800 miles of Wisconsin's highways are kept clean for all of us to enjoy. They work hard for Wisconsin but Wisconsin has not done all we can to make it safe for them to do this community service.

We protect road construction workers, maintenance workers, law enforcement, first responders and tow truck drivers with our laws. Let's make sure that we pass SB 97 so that we can better protect volunteers like Jayna, Autumn, Hayley, Sara Jo and numerous others who put themselves in danger to keep Wisconsin's roads clean and beautiful.

Thank you for hearing this bill and I respectfully ask for your support of SB 97.

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CORY TOMCZYK

STATE SENATOR • 29TH SENATE DISTRICT

March 28, 2023

**Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety
Testimony from Sen. Cory Tomczyk in favor of SB 97**

Chairman Wanggaard and Members of the Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety, thank you for hearing SB 97.

In 2018, tragedy struck Girl Scout Troop 3055. While picking up trash along the road and volunteering with Wisconsin's Adopt-a-Highway program, a driver struck the group killing three girls and one adult.

Under SB 97, Adopt-a-Highway volunteers would receive further protections by increasing penalties for motorists who fail to follow the appropriate traffic laws in a cleanup area. Fines would be doubled in cleanup areas, mirroring existing penalties for traffic violations in construction zones.

SB 97 is identical to 2021 SB 653, which passed out of the Senate committee with bipartisan support.

Wisconsin must protect those across the state who volunteer their time in hazardous environments. These individuals give back to the community and we must act to ensure their safety while they serve our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration of Senate Bill 97.

Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

Wisconsin State Capitol

2 East Main Street

Madison, WI 54702

Dear Committee Member:

My name is Kimberley Helgeson. I live in Chippewa Falls. I'm here to express my support for Senate Bill 97. This bill would afford the same protection to highway clean up volunteers as paid workers in maintenance and construction zones. I am shocked this protection does not already exist. As a driver, I take notice when I see work zones. I'm aware of the fines if I do not follow the law. That's what this bill can bring, increased awareness, education, and safety.

As a driver, my heart sinks to the pit of my stomach when I pass a work zone. I'm not only aware of the law, but I know the terrible outcomes that can take place. My daughter Autumn died picking up a plastic water bottle in the grassy ditch alongside the road. She was 10. Two of her friends died and another was critically injured. I made a new friend the morning of our clean up. I didn't know I'd be trying to find her pulse a few hours later. My youngest daughter was helping too. We watched a truck run over Autumn, Jayna, Sara, Haylee and Madalyn directly in front of us. I knelt to my daughter's ear and whispered the song, You are My Sunshine, as she left this life. It was loving and it was horrific. It is a scene that haunts me every day.

I can't convey the absolute devastation of that moment. The heart wrenching scene that we all experienced including our police officers, helicopter flight, firefighter and EMT crews. The devastation to us personally and emotionally, from that moment forward, is indescribable. It extends to every aspect of our lives and every person around us. It has affected our family, friends, schools, and our community. Please use this devastation to motivate you to pass this bill. To keep others from experiencing this loss.

This was not the first time our family participated in a cleanup project. We've done this along with our Church and in our neighborhood to celebrate Earth Day. While I don't think this bill would have addressed the root cause of my daughter's death, which was a driver huffing. It will keep future volunteers safer. I can't think of any reason why we can't work together to pass this bill.

It's important for me to be here as a mother, a person who believes in service to our community, and as a citizen with a voice and experience relating to this bill. We are all here to show those that come after us, that impactful changes can be made. That we care for another.

Please extend this protection to our community volunteers. Put in place language that should already exist to make them safer. Help to educate and encourage drivers to focus and slowdown in work zones by passing this bill. Please support Senate Bill 97.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to speak with you.

Kimberley Helgeson

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

From: Sherry Salm Jasper

Re: Support of SB 97/AB 89

Thank you for this opportunity Senator Van Wanggaard, my own senator James and members of Judiciary and Public Safety Committee. I'm Sherry Salm Jasper from Chippewa Falls. I was the school counselor at Halmstad Elementary School and served on the Girl Scouts Northwestern Great Lakes Board of Directors. I have since retired from each of those positions. I support AB 89/SB97.

Every life changed on November 3, 2018. I was at a UWEC football game and my son's final marching band performance when I had a phone message and text to call a friend immediately. She was a Girl Scout leader and friend who lived near the crash. She had a sibling of a girl in Troop 3055 and who had been on the other side of the viaduct at her home. Together we pieced together what we could. I began notifying my principal and officials at the Girl Scout Council as I headed home and then to a crisis meeting that lasted for the next seven hours. What I experienced that day and in the months and years that followed was nothing compared to those at the crash site, to those who lost family members, to those who heard, saw, smelled the crash, to those whose innocence was taken. My life will never be the same. I see the suffering and feel a hole. I imagine what Autumn, Jayna, Haylee would be doing now as eighth graders. I imagine Sara's pride at watching Haylee and her son Jasper grow. I'm grateful that Madalyn survived and that we've found ways to honor and remember.

The Girl Scout bill is an additional way to remember Autumn, Jayna, Haylee, Sara, their families and the families of Troop 3055 by adding roadside cleanup volunteers. Twice a year, I gather with Girl Scout adults and staff from Halmstad Elementary to collect litter and garbage along Highway P where 3 children and a mom lost their lives while completing an act of service. We do this for them and every life changed.

I urge you to vote in favor of AB 89/SB97.

Thank you for the opportunity to share.